
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

March 13, 2016

Doubt and Faith

“Will my Lord reject me forever? Will he never be pleased again? Has his faithful love come to a complete end? Is his promise over for future generations? You are the God who works wonders; you have demonstrated your strength among all peoples.”

Psalm 77:7,8,14 (Common English Bible)

British singer, Adele, has struck a deep place in the hearts of millions with her song, “Hello”, a piano ballad. The lyrics discuss themes of nostalgia and regret and it is the first song in history to sell over a million digital copies in a week. Lyrically, the song plays out like a phone conversation, “Hello, it’s me. I was wondering if after all these years you’d like to meet, to go over everything.” The difficulty is, the person to whom she places the telephone call never picks-up the phone, “I must have called a thousand times. But when I call you seem never to be home.” I have no doubt that these words resonate with different listeners in different ways. For me, these words express my prayer life some days. I place a call to God but God simply refuses to answer. “Will my Lord reject me forever?”

Whether consciously or unconsciously, a person of faith occasionally experiences conflict in their thoughts about God. There are those moments in life when it seems easy to affirm God, to believe in a larger purpose than our own small lives, and that, in Christ, we are called to participate in that high and holy purpose. There are other moments where it is just as easy to doubt and deny the goodness – and justice – of God, and even to question whether there is a God at all. In these few verses from Psalm 77, we see these two opposed moods of faith – doubt and questioning in two verses, and in the third, a recovery of faith. This conflict of the heart is familiar to most people of faith.

With this condition of the heart, what are we to do about it? Herbert H. Farmer proposes an extremely important question in regard to this conflict: “To which of these two voices in the soul concerning God are we going to make up our minds deliberately and consciously always to give the greater weight?”¹ Are we going to choose to place our faith in God on trial and require of it proof before the weight of evidence to the contrary? Or will we adopt the position that doubt must justify itself fully before the evidence of our faith? Quite simply, will we say my belief in God must prove itself in times of my doubt or will we say that my doubt must prove itself against my faith? If we do not deliberately and consciously make this decision, argues Farmer, life itself will continually force us to answer it again and again unconsciously, without deliberate thought and intention. The result will be that we shall continually oscillate between the two positions, depending upon the present strength or weakness of the heart.

Naturally, each person must choose a deliberate decision or an unconscious decision determined by the uncertain rhythms of life. For my part, I have decided that a reasonable person doesn’t leave such a decision to the uncertainties of life. Without running away from moments of doubt and questioning, I will always subject such moments to the evidence of faith I have personally experienced. In troubling times, I am going to deliberately and consciously trust my belief, my faith, my deep inner conviction that confirms God and God’s love and care for me - particularly when it seems that God never is at home when I place my call to God in prayer.

Doug Hood

¹ Herbert H. Farmer, “Doubt and Faith,” **Best Sermons: 1947 Edition**, edited by G. Paul Butler (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947), 146.